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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Kanuti

## *National Wildlife Refuge*

### What's New with Kanuti

Refuge staff have been very busy this past year. Here is a look at some of the events that have taken place.

#### **Kanuti Refuge Manager Bob Schulz Retires:**

Bob had a 30 long year career of public service including a tour of duty in Viet Nam and 10 years as Deputy Refuge Manager for Tetlin Refuge in Tok. His early August retirement came as a surprise to many.

When Bob joined Kanuti in 2001, he rolled up his sleeves and went to work. During his three years with the refuge, Bob began the process of revising Kanuti's 15 year management plan and served as an important advisor on Kanuti's biological review. But Bob's love for building soon became a driving force for much of the work he would complete on Kanuti. Bob worked on the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center plans and when work slowed, Bob picked up a hammer and helped complete housing at Marion Creek. He also made sure that long neglected maintenance projects were funded. Bob was also very interested in subsistence issues and his long service with the federal government provided him with a broad perspective on many issues. As a thank you for Bob's hard work, the Western Interior Regional Advisory Council presented Bob with a plaque commending his efforts. The plaque reads, "Western Interior Regional Advisory Council Thanks Bob Schulz for your years of service to Rural Alaska. October 2004"



Bob and his family continue to live and work in Fairbanks. We all wish Bob and his family the very best!!



#### **Mike Spindler Named Refuge Manager of Kanuti Refuge:**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has named Mike Spindler as the new manager of Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge. Mike is an experienced Service pilot with more than 7,000 hours of flying time (most earned while piloting Super Cubs during Alaska wildlife surveys). Mr. Spindler was formerly of the Koyukuk/Nowitna National Wildlife Refuge Complex (near Galena, Alaska), where he worked since 1990 and has served as Refuge Manager for the last four years. "I feel like I'm coming full circle and am glad to be returning to Fairbanks," Spindler said. "After receiving my Master's degree in wildlife at UAF in the 1970s, I've spent most of my career in the Bush. I've always been a hands-on field person, and I'm looking forward to leading the Service's program at Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge."

Mike will start working for the refuge in Fairbanks this month.

## More Kanuti Refuge Staff Changes:

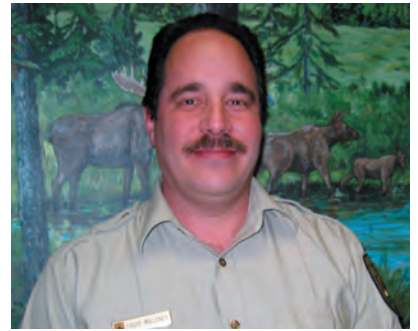


### **Christopher Harwood: Wildlife Biologist**

Chris Harwood transferred to Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge in March 2003, after 12 years with Yukon Delta Refuge. After 10 years in Bethel, he and his wife moved to Fairbanks in the fall of 2000, to pursue studies at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks. Chris' biological career has focused mainly on studying Alaska's birds. He will serve primarily as Kanuti's bird biologist, but will also help out with other projects. Chris is the co-chair of Boreal Partners in Flight, an interagency group promoting conservation of Alaska's landbirds.

### **Louis Maloney: Administrative Assistant:**

Lou joined the Kanuti staff in November 2004. Before working for Kanuti, he worked for ten years in the U.S. Army as a Military Policeman, six years with the Defense Logistics Agency on a term employment position as a Property Disposal Technician/Forklift Operator, and seven months as a U.S. Army Department of Defense employee/Automated Service and Support Technician, managing all the installation property books (144 of them) on Fort Wainwright. Lou is now serving as the first smiling face visitors see when they come into the Fairbanks office and is responsible for all of Kanuti's administrative duties.



### **Kimberly Robinson: Administrative Assistant:**

Originally from Louisiana, Kimberly has lived in Alaska for six years. Before she came to Kanuti Refuge in November 2003, Kimberly worked for the U.S. Army for seven years in the fields of Finance, Computer Technology and Personnel. She is currently pursuing her Bachelor's Degree in Accounting with a minor in Business Law and is writing her first book. She thoroughly enjoys reading, decorating (interior and private functions), sewing, and traveling.

### **Lorna Young: Administrative Assistant:**

Lorna came to Kanuti in October 2004, after working over 17 years for Department of Defense agencies in various accounting, supply, statistical, and secretarial positions throughout the Western U.S. and Europe. Lorna has an Associates Degree in Education and is presently pursuing her Bachelor's Degree in Business/Finance at University of Alaska, Fairbanks. Lorna's hobbies include gardening, sewing, camping, and traveling to warmer climates.



### **Harvey Williams leaves Bettles to train dogs in North Pole!**

Refuge Operations Specialist Harvey Williams left Kanuti this past spring to join friends in North Pole, where he has been helping train dogs for the Iditarod. Harvey worked for Kanuti for almost six years and approached any job, from moving fuel and driving boats to collecting insects and counting birds, with enthusiasm and a winning grin. We hope to see him on the trail in the future. Good luck Harvey!





## 2004 Fire Season:

2004 was a very active fire year in Alaska with almost 6.7 million acres burned statewide as of December 2. Kanuti Refuge had its share of fires. The two largest, the Clawanmenka and Evansville fires, were on the northeastern border of the refuge. By the end of August, the Evansville fire was over 122,000 acres and the Clawanmenka fire was over 108,000 acres, and the fires were still burning. Several other small fires started on the refuge, but their acreage totaled less than five acres. Just outside of the refuge's western border, the Lake Totatonten fire was at 12,376 acres on September 15 and still burning.

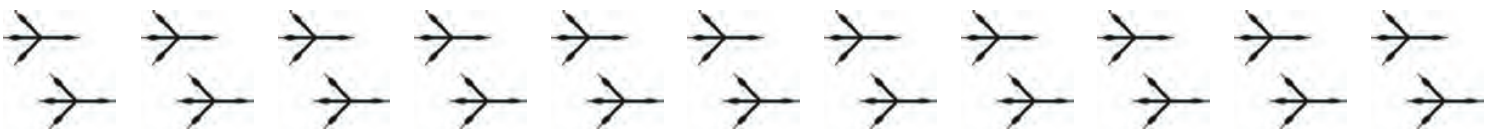


*Refuge staff wore face masks during the project to protect them from breathing in large amounts of smoke from nearby wildfires*

## Small Mammals:

Despite the large amounts of smoke in the air throughout the summer, refuge staff continued with a long-term project studying how small mammal populations react in the years following a fire. The project area is located in a 1990 burn and refuge staff have been trapping the area since 1991. This is a unique study in interior Alaska because it started just after a wildland fire and has continued ever since.

In 1997, the number of yellow-cheeked voles caught began to increase, but the total number of animals captured this year was the lowest number trapped since 1996. Others working with small mammals in interior Alaska also reported catching less animals this year. It is not known if our results are part of a regional cycle or if the this is due to a drop in yellow-cheeked voles as habitat changes after a burn.



## New Bird Found on Kanuti Refuge:

Although we have learned much about refuge resources in the last 20 years, we still lack basic information about the plants and animals living on the refuge, particularly in areas that are difficult to access by boat or float plane. The refuge is starting an inventory of plants, birds, small mammals, and insects in over 60 areas across the refuge. Trees from the areas will also be aged to provide fire history information, as refuge fire maps only go back to 1950. It may take at least 10 years to survey all the plots. Three plots were surveyed in 2004, and a new bird for the refuge was discovered- a palm warbler. Although a few palm warblers have been found in interior Alaska during migration, this may be one of the only observations for our area during the breeding season.



Photo by: Chaiyan Kasomdorkbua



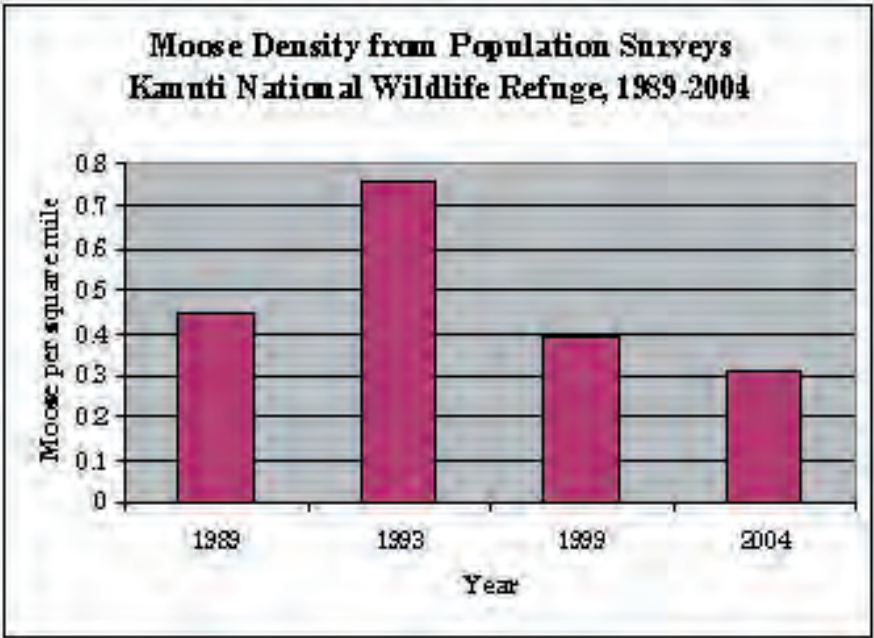


## Moose Population Survey:

Moose population surveys have been conducted for Kanuti Refuge in the fall of 1989, 1993, 1999, and 2004. The 2004 survey area covered 11,494 mi<sup>2</sup> of upper Game Management Unit 24. The survey was a cooperative effort involving Kanuti Refuge, the Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the State. Results were looked at for the entire area and for each separate land management area.

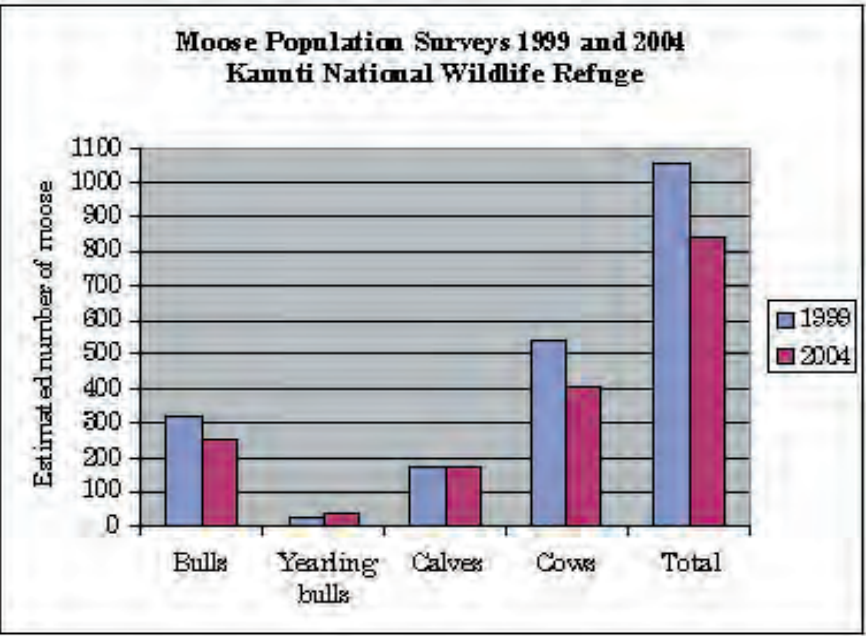


The Kanuti results are shown in the graphs below. Moose density (moose per square mile) has declined between 1989 and 2004 (Graph 1) with a peak in 1993. The 1999 and 2004 surveys covered the same area. Those results are shown in Graph 2. Total moose were down in 2004, but the number of calves was similar to 1999 and yearling bulls were slightly higher than they were in 1999. Bulls and cows were down, with the largest decline in the number of cows.



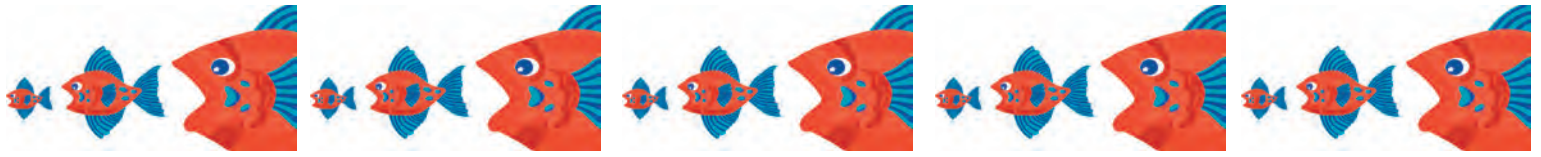
Graph 1:

This graph shows the estimated moose density (number of moose per square mile) from different surveys. It includes bulls, cows, and calves. Density has declined from over 0.4 moose per square mile in 1989 to just over 0.3 moose per square mile in 2004. The density peaked in 1993, with over 0.7 moose per square mile.



Graph 2:

This graph shows a direct comparison between the number of moose estimated to be on the refuge in fall 1999 and 2004. Calf production was about equal between years, but some calves will not survive the winter. The number of yearling bulls is an index of how many male calves survive to one year old. There were slightly more yearling bulls in 2004 than 1999, but the number of cows and bulls were down in 2004.



## Whitefish Radio Telemetry Project:

The Fish and Wildlife Service partnered with Kim Elkin, a fisheries biologist, and Valli Peterson, a fisheries intern, from the Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) to complete a whitefish telemetry project to find out movements and habitat use of broad and humpback whitefish and least cisco on Kanuti Refuge. Fish were sampled from several areas in 2003 to locate potential fish collection sites and to collect ear bones, which are used to age fish. Tests of the ear bones can also determine whether the fish has entered a marine (salty) environment. These tests showed that some fish of all three species had migrated to saltwater at some point during their life cycle.

In late May 2004, a number of humpback whitefish, broad whitefish, and least cisco were radio-tagged in the Kanuti River wetlands, upstream from the mouth of the Kanuti Kilolitna River. Radio-tagged fish of all three species moved throughout the wetlands during the summer months. Beginning in late August, some humpback whitefish migrated upstream in the Kanuti River near the outlet stream to Tokusatatquaten Lake, where they have stayed for almost a month. Other humpback whitefish left the Kanuti River and traveled to the Alatna River. Some of these fish may be gathered upstream of Siruk Creek. In both of these cases, the behavior of the fish strongly suggests that these areas are being used as spawning sites.



Broad whitefish are thought to spawn later in the fall than humpbacks. Four of the radio-tagged broad whitefish left the Kanuti River and traveled in the Koyukuk River between the mouths of the Kanuti and Alatna rivers, and in the Alatna River mouth. They will be closely watched over the next few weeks to identify spawning locations. Some broad whitefish remain in the Kanuti River wetlands. Some of these fish may be non-spawning adults, but additional fish may still migrate to spawning areas.

Least ciscos have remained throughout the Kanuti River wetlands. They are moving around the river and the lake systems in the region. They are expected to migrate to spawning areas soon, but we know very little about what to expect from these fish. We will watch these fish during the next surveys to identify migrations if they occur.





## Beaver Cache Surveys:

Beaver cache surveys were conducted in 2002 and 2003. Results for both years are in the table below. Estimates are for the number of food caches, not beaver themselves. We would be interested in information from trappers about how many beavers tend to occupy a lodge in the Kanuti area. We estimated there were 1,148 caches on the refuge in 2002 and 1,337 caches in 2003. Assuming five beaver are associated with a cache, the surveys indicate there are around 5,740 – 6,685 beaver on the refuge.

### Results of beaver cache surveys, 2002 and 2003

Year	Surveyed Units	Estimate Caches	Range of Estimates (90% CI)
2002	100	1,148.07	985 - 1,311
2003	76	1,337.09	1,153 - 1,521

## Kanuti Plan Revision:

Kanuti Refuge is in the process of updating its 15 year management plan or CCP. The first step in the process of rewriting the plan is to hold public meetings in each village and town affected by the plan's outcome. Refuge staff held meetings in Bettles/Evansville, Allakaket/Alatna, Fairbanks, and Anchorage. At each meeting, people voiced their opinions on how the refuge should be managed. We heard many comments on preserving the wild character of the refuge including requests to keep it wild as well as requests for the protection provided by inclusion in the Wilderness system. Several requests focused on continued absence of roads and visitor facilities within refuge boundaries. Others expressed concern for too much "interference and control" and the reduction of intrusive research techniques. Another Kanuti Refuge Planning Newsletter will come out soon with more detailed information on what we heard at these meetings.



## New 1-800 Phone Number for Kanuti Refuge:

Kanuti has a new toll free number. Anytime you need to talk with someone from the Kanuti staff, please call 1-877-220-1853.

As always, if you have questions about something you saw in this newsletter please call the Fairbanks office and ask for Jody.

**1-877-220-1853**

